



DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

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Testimony of Don DeFronzo

Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee January 20, 2011

Good morning Senator Looney, Representative Janowski, Senator Fasano, Representative Piscopo and members of the Committee. It is an honor to be with you this morning, having been nominated by Governor Malloy to lead the Department of Administrative Services. Today I want to share with you a brief summary of my personal background and then talk a little about the DAS and my plans for the agency.

Immediately prior to my appointment, I was privileged to serve the people of the Sixth Senatorial District as their State Senator, an honor for which I will always be grateful. Importantly, during my first two terms here I chaired the Government Administration and Elections Committee, which has oversight responsibility for DAS and other administrative agencies. From 2003 through 2006 I had a direct role in developing the prequalification process and contracting standards now used by DAS.

From 1996 to 2002, I was employed as the executive director of the Human Resources Agency of New Britain, a large multipurpose non-profit social service agency with approximately 220 employees and an annual budget of about \$14 million. Before that, I spent a number of years as Planning Analyst and Supervising Analyst in the state Office of Policy and Management, and from 1989 to 1993 I served as mayor of the city of New Britain, where I eliminated the city's deficit, balanced the budget four consecutive years, built the city's fund balances, reduced the size of local government and, in 1993, reduced property taxes for the first time in twenty years.

Along the way I helped organize a large state employee union, was elected as its president and after several successful terms in that capacity was chosen by the late Albert Shanker to be a national vice president of the American Federation of Teachers. Basically, my entire adult life has been in public service.

With respect to my education, I earned a B.A. from Fairfield University graduating in 1970 with the distinguished Majority Leader of the Connecticut State Senate. Later I obtained a Masters Degree in Public Affairs from the University of Connecticut in 1976. My wife Diane and I have been married for forty years and have two grown children.

Turning to the agency, DAS is a large diversified bureaucratic entity, operating under the authority granted by several different statutes. DAS employs 330 men and women with a General Fund Budget of \$43.2 million, and other program funds bringing the total to approximately \$100 million. While in terms of the number of employees and budget, DAS is a mid-sized agency, its administrative reach and impact is substantial with major functional responsibility in a number of areas including:

- Statewide fleet management;
- Procurement of goods and services for most state agencies (CGS 4a - 50);
- Statewide personnel recruitment and testing (Chapter 67);
- Maintenance and management of the state's classification system (Chapter 67);
- Collection services (CGS 4a-12);
- Operation of the Small Agency Resource Team (SmART), which embodies Connecticut's approach to the shared services model of government organization, involving services to more than 20 small and mid-sized state agencies and offices (P.A.05-251 Section 60 (c)); and
- Workers' Compensation Administration for state employees (CGS 31-284a)

In all these areas, cost containment, efficiency and improved services to state agencies will be our goal.

In the area of procurement, I want to re-evaluate the post Rowland era prequalification and contract requirements to attempt to make them more business friendly, while preserving the system's protection against potential misuse.

We also want to aggressively move forward and expand the state's use of cost-savings measures, such as reverse auctions, on line bidding, cooperative buying and competitive negotiations. We also want to take all possible legal measures to insure that Connecticut state businesses and employers of Connecticut residents have the greatest possible access to state-funded contracts. Today, fully one out of three Connecticut contractors is an out of state business.

The DAS Collections Unit has recently broken the \$1.2 billion mark in federal reimbursements and from claims against individuals and estates. Here we need to continue to clarify our statutes to improve our ability to achieve collection goals and work effectively with all state agencies to maximize collection revenue.

Statewide Human Resources Management continues to carry out key components of the large scale assessment and selection of candidates for our various state public safety professions. We have reconfigured our job application to comply with last session's "ban the box" legislation regarding no longer asking for information on criminal convictions for most applicants, and we used that opportunity to transform that application to a form that can be completed, saved, and submitted electronically. Additionally, job seekers have been able to register themselves to receive e-mail notices of all state examination and job announcements the same day they appear on our website, which has been an extremely popular e-government application.

Fleet operations, often a target of criticism, has achieved some significant economies in recent years. The size of the fleet has been reduced from 4,576 vehicles in 2008 to approximately 3,500 today. Also the number of dedicated staff has fallen from 77 in 2003 to 43 today. Still we will continue to search for additional savings in the areas of parts management, fuel usage, vehicle procurement and related activities. The Workers' Compensation Unit processed more than \$109 million in state employee claims in 2010, with 6,699 new claims being filed last year. The unit conducts worker training and safety programs designed to mitigate claims and in 2010 the number of new claims filed dropped by 13.9%. Other initiatives in this unit resulted in savings and repayments of almost \$4 million. Moving forward, we want to increase prevention efforts, extend central processing services to many small state agencies to decrease error rates, and better coordinate the work of the Workers' Comp unit and the State Insurance and Risk Management Board.

Perhaps the most rapidly growing unit in DAS is SmART (Small Agency Resource Team), which has grown to provide back office business office functions for 21 small and mid-sized agencies, and human resources, payroll and affirmative action services to 23 agencies. In the process, SmART has achieved significant economies in staffing and improved performance rates as measured by fewer processing errors. This unit embodies the state's effort to improve performance by using the shared services model of government organization. Consistent with recommendations made in a recent OPM survey of agency practices and recommendations made by the Commission on Enhancing Agency Outcomes, I want to explore additional opportunities to expand the number of agencies participating in the SmART program.

In conclusion, I want to tell you that in the short time I have been at DAS, I have been deeply impressed by the professional attitude and constructive approach of the employees there. They all know, as we all know, that big changes are coming and, given the opportunity to be heard, I am confident they will be a great asset in our efforts to improve the operation of state government.

I am looking forward to working in Governor Malloy's administration; I am honored by the confidence he has placed in me and I am excited by the opportunity we have to work together, Republicans and Democrats, as we tackle the problems before us. As a

member of the legislature I respected all of my colleagues, I sought out diverse opinions, worked for consensus and, in many cases, we achieved good results. I expect to take the same approach in this new job as Commissioner of the Department of Administrative Services.

Thank you for you for the opportunity to speak with you today and I look forward to your questions.

Written Testimony
of
Linda Spoonster Schwartz, RN, MSN, DrPH, FAAN
before
Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
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Chairman Looney, Senator Williams, Chairwoman Janowski, distinguished members of the Committee. It is a distinct honor for me to come before you today as Governor Malloy's nominee for the position of Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Veterans' Affairs. I want to thank the Committee for the opportunity to present this testimony and for your consideration of this nomination. Although I have served as Commissioner of Veteran Affairs since 2003, I appear before you today with a great deal of humility, but also with tremendous excitement about the opportunity to continue serving Connecticut's veterans and their families.

With our nation at war and the needs of the fine men and women of our Armed Forces growing exponentially each day, I cannot think of a more important time in this state's history to be serving as Commissioner of Veterans' Affairs. I can truly say that this position is a culmination of my life experiences, educational preparation and work both as a veterans' advocate and public health nurse. I am honored by Governor Malloy's confidence in me and the trust and support of Connecticut's veteran population.

For the past 45 years, I have devoted my life and profession to caring for others – as a practicing nurse, researcher and advocate for veterans. I joined the United States Air Force during the Vietnam War and served for 16 years. My major assignments were as a flight nurse both on Active Duty and in the Reserves until I was medically retired following injuries I sustained in an aircraft accident. Part of my passion for veterans' affairs and concern about our systems of care for veterans comes from being a direct consumer of that care as a disabled veteran.

I earned my Master of Science in Nursing from the Yale School of Nursing and a Doctorate in Public Health Administration from the Yale School of Medicine. Over the last three decades I have been very involved at the state and national level in veterans' issues, serving in leadership and advisory positions in several organizations. I was elected President of the Connecticut Nurses Association and the Connecticut Nurses Foundation. I also had the honor to be elected to the National Board of Directors of the American Nurses Association, Vietnam Veterans of America and the Vietnam Women's Memorial. From 1989-2000, I was appointed to several Advisory Committees by the U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs, which included the issues of Readjustment of Combat Veterans, Homeless Veterans, Women Veterans and Seriously Mentally Ill Veterans. I am currently President of the National Association of State Directors of Veteran Affairs, an organization comprised by the top veterans' affairs officials in each state, District of Columbia and US territories.

When I first came before this Committee in 2003, I identified two major priorities. The first was to bring the State Veteran Home at Rocky Hill into the 21st Century – to make the facilities worthy of the service and sacrifices of our veterans and a source of pride for all citizens of this state. Secondly, I

wanted to begin to create a statewide agency that was relevant and responsive to all Connecticut veterans. My efforts have been focused on these goals. With the help and support of many individuals, I can say changes and improvements have been instituted and we have demonstrated progress in both of these areas. However, there is still much more work to be done.

Rebuilding Rocky Hill

At the Home in Rocky Hill, we run an average daily census of 500 veterans, who range in age from their early twenties to over ninety years old. I believe the neglect of the infrastructure at the facilities is well-known: structures with original electrical wiring and water fixtures that date back to 1938, accompanied by a lack of adequate amenities – which include air conditioning and handicapped accessible rooms and doorways. Initially, the most pressing issues were to improve and modernize the living conditions for the veterans at Rocky Hill by harnessing new resources – and breathe some life into the facility.

In 2004, with the help of the General Assembly, Connecticut instituted changes to open eligibility for admission to the Home at Rocky Hill and burial in the State Veterans Cemetery for both wartime and peacetime veterans. This was further broadened in 2009 to include members of the Connecticut National Guard and Reservists who were eligible for Federal Retirement Benefits. This was accomplished with no additional cost to the State of Connecticut and relies heavily on reimbursement from the Federal Government which has increased income for the General Fund.

In the seven years I have served as Commissioner of Veterans Affairs, we have been fortunate to apply for and receive over \$30M in grant funds from the US Department of Veteran Affairs. The first grant was for construction of the Sgt John L. Levitow Health Care Facility (a \$33,823,838 project to which VA contributed \$21,985,495 and was matched by \$11,838,343 from the State) awarded in 2005 with the building being occupied by October of 2008. This facility accommodates 125 veterans and is licensed as a Chronic Disease Hospital by the Connecticut Department of Public Health and certified by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and meets the standards for Medicare/Medicaid reimbursement. The second project was replacement of the very antiquated 1938 water system with a completely new water loop system (total cost of this project was \$4,600,000 with Federal VA contributing \$2,990,000 matched by \$1,610,000 from the State). In 2010, the Department competed for and was awarded \$5.9 million in Federal grant funding under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, matched by \$3.2 million in state funding from the State Bond Commission to provide new roofs, handicap accessible bathrooms, modern fire suppression systems and air conditioning

Levitow Health Care Center Rocky Hill once had a full-service hospital but the present mission has been revised to provide long-term healthcare and rehabilitation services to veterans with chronic and disabling medical conditions. The programs and services include: general medical care, Alzheimer's and related dementia care, hospice care, palliative care, long-term care, short-term rehabilitation, respite care, and substance abuse programs which are provided by a professional staff that includes physicians; advanced practice nurses; full nursing staff; social workers; physical, speech, occupational, and recreational therapists; laboratory and cardiopulmonary technicians; and a pharmacy. I am proud to report that this year the facility was inspected by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs which found no deficiencies and received special recognition for the obvious hard work and dedication displayed by our staff.